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ABSTRACT

In response to parents' needs, New Zealand has developed a diverse range of early childhood care and education services. These services include kindergarten programs; child care centers with trained staff; play centers that are parent cooperatives; Te Kohanga Reo (Maori speaking centers) located on tribal property; home-based networks (clusters of homes under the supervision of chartered home-based care arrangers); preschool classes in primary schools; the early childhood department of the New Zealand Correspondence School; and play groups funded by the Early Childhood Development Unit. Although these services are commendable, there are problems of fragmentation, inequality, and unacceptable diversity in the range of standards within and between services. In 1988, the government of New Zealand focused on goals of equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and economy in its early childhood services. Policies were set to establish: (1) regulations, codes of practice, charter guidelines, and state bulk grant funding for early childhood centers; (2) early childhood curriculum guidelines; and (3) a qualifications framework for early childhood education. In 1989, new agencies were established to implement these reforms, and since that time, the reforms have been successfully implemented. In spite of some difficulties in adjusting to changes in certain programs, most services have seen clear advantages from the reforms. (MM)

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EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION REFORMS IN NEW ZEALAND

Notes for a Presentation at OMEP, Flagstaff, Arizona, August 1992.

Carol F.Garden, New Zealand Ministry of Education

New Zealand has a diverse range of early childhood care and education services which have arisen out of the needs of parents for different types of service to meet their different situations. A feature of the New Zealand early childhood scene has been the high level of parent and community involvement in initiating and maintaining services. Early childhood services receive financial and professional support from the state but in general manage their own affairs.

SERVICES

The development of early childhood services in New Zealand has largely been based on two important beliefs that are held to be essential for the optimal development and learning of infants and young children. These are the vital role that parents play in the education of their children, and the need to integrate 'care' and 'education' in early childhood programmes.

As at 1 July 1991, the major government funded early childhood services in New Zealand fell into eight separate categories, according to their distinctive structural, philosophical and cultural differences.

Kindergartens

Five hundred and seventy eight (578) kindergartens provided sessional programmes for 44,363 three and four year olds.

Kindergarten policy is to employ only those holding a NZ Free Kindergarten Union Diploma or the three year Early Childhood Education Diploma from one of the six colleges of education.
Kindergartens are purpose-built, formerly with a generous state subsidy but in future with money raised from the community.
Parents pay a voluntary donation towards running costs and receive additional state bulk grant funding for administration and teacher salaries.

The kindergarten programme is designed to meet the holistic needs of children. Kindergartens operate as a partnership with parents and trained teachers working together.

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Childcare centres

Seven hundred and forty one (741) childcare centres provided both sessional and full-day programmes for 35,104 children aged from birth to school age.

Childcare centres employ a range of staff, from those having no formal training to three year college of education trained early childhood teachers. The supervisor must be trained. Some centres have particular programmes, such as Montessori, Rudolph Steiner, and special needs programmes. Very few centres are purpose-built. Childcare centres receive state bulk grant funding for administration and salary costs, and parents pay fees towards running costs and staff salaries.

Childcare centres were under the control of the Department of Social Welfare until 1986 when they were transferred to the Department of Education. This transfer has resulted in childcare centres strengthening the education focus of their programmes.

Playcentres

Six hundred and six (606) playcentres provide sessional programmes for 21,578 children aged from birth to school age.

Parents undertake playcentre parent training programmes and collectively supervise. Some centres are purpose-built, but wide use is made of rented accommodation and vacant school classrooms. Playcentres receive state bulk grant funding for administration and parents pay a fee towards running costs, and supervision expenses. There are no regular staff salary costs.

Playcentres are parent co-operatives and their training programmes are intended to enable parents become more confident in their parenting role.

Te Kohanga Reo (Maori language speaking centres)

Six hundred and thirty (630) Te Kohanga Reo centres provided full-day programmes for 10,451 children aged from birth to school age.

Many kohanga are held in buildings on tribal property (the marae), some in rented accommodation and some in vacant school classrooms. Parents assist the kaiako (supervisor) with supervision of the programme. Kaiako must be adjudged by tribal elders to meet criteris set for this position. Kohanga receive state bulk grant funding for administration and parents pay a small (koha) fee towards running costs and supervision expenses.

Home-based networks

Fifty three (53) home-based networks provided a programme for 2,387 children aged from birth to school age.

Networks are clusters of homes under the supervision of a chartered home-based care arranger. Co-ordinators place children with caregivers for an agreed number of hours per week. Caregivers in homes are supported through home visits, playgroups, and parent training programmes. The management (care arranger) of the home-based networks, receives state bulk grant funding for administration. Parents pay fees to the care arranger.

Preschool classes in primary schools

Twenty nine (29) preschool classes in primary schools provided a programme for 853 three and four year olds. Preschool classes, as a separate category, will be dis-established by January 1993. The community and parents will decide if their 'class' is to become a childcare centre, a funded playgroup, or to close down.

Correspondence School

Seven hundred and ninety three three and four year olds were enrolled in the early childhood department of the Correspondence School.

The New Zealand Correspondence School is state funded and employs only those holding a kindergarten or college of education diploma. Parents do not pay fees.

Funded playgroups

Four hundred and twenty six (426) playgroups were funded through the Early Childhood Development Unit (ECDU) and provided from one to three sessions per week for 10,605 children aged from birth to school age.

The total number of funded playgroups included 3,274 children enrolled in 160 Pacific Island Language speaking playgroups.

At least half the parents stay with their children and collectively supervise. Parents pay a small donation towards the rental, heating and lighting etc. Many playgroups are located in rural areas. Some funded playgroups develop into childcare centres.

Over many years prior to 1988, these diverse early childhood care and education services had developed in response to local initiative and parent demand. While there was much to applaud in the diversity of services

available, there was also fragmentation, inequality and an unacceptable diversity in the range of standards within and between services.

1988 REVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In 1988 a series of major reviews of education administration at all levels of education, early childhood, were held. The Report of The Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, titled 'Education to be More', Government Printer, Wellington, New Zealand, was released in August 1988. This report provided the foundation and the framework for remodelling the delivery of early childhood care and education services.

"Education to be More" identified the existing early childhood care and education structure as being out of date for New Zealand's economic, social and educational needs. Services had developed piecemeal over many years resulting in fragmentation of the system and inequality between services.

The review drew attention, inter alia, to the following weaknesses in the system:

- unequal access to government funding and resources by service providers, and unequal access to services by many families;

- significant sections of the community not being adequately provided for, eg. rural families, infants under two years old, children with special needs, and Maori and Pacific Island families;

- several sets of regulations in operation resulting in widely differing standards of care and education for children, and widely differing conditions of service for staff;

- slowness of the system to respond to economic, social and educational change;

- lack of co-ordination in both the provision of services and between the sources of government funding;

- lack of adequate provision both for women who choose to participate in the workforce, and for women at home caring for children;

- lack of readily available information and guidance for parents to support them in the rearing of young children, and providing for their educational needs;

It was time for changes to be made.

1988 GOVERNMENT GOALS FOR EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION REFORM

In addressing the task of reforming the administrative structures of early childhood services, "Education to be More" focussed on the underlying goals that the Government of the time had made a commitment to. These goals were based on:

Equity

- the principle of access to education for all
- equal employment opportunities for those working in education
- a recognition that the Treaty of Waitangi (between the indigenous Maori people and the colonists) has special relevance for education.

Quality

- the Government's responsibility for ensuring high standards in care and education.

Efficiency

- a recognition that resources in education are limited and that the best use be made of those available.

Effectiveness

- a need to ensure that the resources deployed in education achieve the desired results.

Economy

- the community receiving value for money from the considerable investment of resources in education.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION REFORMS

In December 1988, the Government released its statement of intent for early childhood education reform in its policy document 'Before Five', Early Childhood Care and Education in New Zealand, December 1988, and policies were introduced to give effect to these goals.

These policies were to establish:

Regulations

One set of regulations to establish minimum licensing standards for all early childhood centres. Without a licence, no centre may operate unless given an exemption for special circumstances.

Codes of Practice

Codes of practice to establish minimum standards for chartered home-based networks. (To be completed by September 1992).

Charter guidelines

National guidelines for the development of charters to be negotiated with parents and community. The charters to set out the objectives and practices under which all licensed early childhood centres or home-based networks would operate. Chartered services are encouraged to have higher standards than licensing standards.

State bulk grant funding

A direct bulk, based on a universal funding formula, to be paid to all chartered early childhood services, according to the ages of the children enrolled. $4.50 per child per hour for children under two years, and $2.25 per child per hour for children two years of age and over, up to a maximum of 30 hours per child per week. Centres without charters must still be licensed but would receive no funding from Government.

Funded playgroups to be exempt from licensing and receive $1 per child per hour. This payment would assist with the payment of rent, heating lighting, snack for the children etc. and act as as an incentive and a support to enable parents arrange a playgroup situation for themselves in the absence of other early childhood services being available. Many of these funded playgroups develop into licensed and chartered early childhood centres.

Early childhood Curriculum guidelines

National early childhood curriculum guidelines to support developmentally appropriate programmes required of all licensed centres. (These guidelines will be drafted by December 1992 and trialled during 1993). A number of resource documents supporting different aspects of the curriculum are expected to be developed following publication of the curriculum guidelines.

Qualifications framework

A national qualifications framework that establishes benchmarks, or levels, for the many different early childhood education qualifications that exist.

Implementation of these policies, along with major changes to primary, secondary and post-compulsory education, over the past three years has seen New Zealand embarking on the most thoroughgoing reform of education administration, and changes to its educational structures, than it has ever experienced.

NEW EDUCATION AGENCIES ESTABLISHED

New education agencies were established on 1 October 1989 to implement the new education reforms. They replaced the former Department of Education whose combined functions and responsibilities were separated out and allocated to the new agencies.

The new agencies and their functions are:

The Ministry of Education provides policy advice to the Minister, licenses centres, negotiates charters and recommends, approves and manages financial flows and operational activities, including the payment of bulk grant funding to chartered services. It manages a discretionary grants scheme to help services with capital costs, and produces curriculum resources.

The Early Childhood Development Unit is contracted to the Ministry of Education to provide liaison, co-ordination, support and training for early childhood services. It also provides funding to recognised funded playgroups.

The Special Education Service is contracted to the Ministry of Education to provide specialist advisory and support services to schools, early childhood centres, and parents who have children with special educational needs.

The Education Review Office is a stand alone agency and is responsible for monitoring licensed and chartered early childhood services.

The NZ Qualifications Authority is a stand alone agency and is responsbile for all national qualifications. It has established a qualifications framework for early childhood education qualifications which set benchmarks ranging from 40 points, which equates with a one year full-time training programme, to 80 points, a two years full-time training programme, to the top benchmark of 120 points, which equates to a three year full-time training programme.

The Teacher Registration Board is a stand alone agency and registers three year trained early childhood teachers, and primary and secondary school teachers. Registration is not compulsory.

EFFECTS OF 1988 GOVERNMENT GOALS FOR EDUCATION

The early childhood education reform policies of 1988 have been successively implemented over the last three years.

While the original intentions of 'Education to be More' have been modified during the restructuring process, including some changes of emphasis following a change of Government,in 1990, the 1988 government goals of equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness and economy have remained firmly in place as the underlying principles for educational change.

They can be identified as follows:

Equity

Access for all
- no limit on the number of new centres or home-based networks
- targeted assistance for some families - fees subsidy
- exemption from licensing for funded playgroups -$1 per child per hour (includes some TKR centres and playcentres)
- policy for ECE centres above ground level
- building modifications introduced for users with disabilities

Equal employment opportunities
- charter statements for staff development
- centre-based training programmes
- Employment Contract Bill

Recognition of Treaty of Waitangi
- included in Equity statements for charters

Quality

Further Imporoving Standards
- three year ECE training established in all Colleges of Education
- equivalency training courses, and additional Advanced Studies for Teachers papers
- ECE Regulations1990- ECE teaching qualification recognition
- first aid qualifications recognised
- staff:child ratios adjusted

- NZ Building Act and Building Code
- curriculum guidelines for developmentally appropriate programmes
- charter guidelines - desirable objectives and practices
- Codes of Practice for chartered home-based care arrangers
- ECE research projects
- trial of Parents as First Teachers (parent education for new parents) programme introduced
- recognition of hospital playgroups as ECE centres

Efficiency - Best use made of limited resources
- financial accountability measures introduced

Effectiveness - Resources used to achieve desired results
- monitoring by Education Review Office

Economy - Community receives value for money
- self management, local decision making, financial accountability

In addition, the new Government has emphasised the desirability of providing parents with a choice of services, the enhancement of children's achievement, and the self management of all education institutions.

IMPACT OF REFORMS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES

The introduction and management of any major change in one's personal or professional life is never easy and can be painful. The introduction and management of major education reforms, and the subsequent changes they have brought about for early childhood services in New Zealand, has not been easy and not without pain.

For many, the impact of the reforms has meant the need to focus more clearly on goals and objectives, and to establish more efficient and transparent systems of financial accountability for the use of government funds.

For many, the reforms have altered forever the way in which things have traditionally been done.

The reforms have impacted on different service providers and staff in different ways. Each early childhood education service has its own story to tell about the impact the reforms have had on their organisation.

While the impact of the implementation of the reforms has disrupted and disturbed service providers and staff, it has also stimulated and

challenged them. In spite of the difficulties of adjustment and some reservations, most services see clear advantages stemming from the reforms.

CONCLUSION

The Government is committed to the provision of high quality, self managing, accessible and affordable early childhood education. The measures that have been put in place over the last three years, namely - one set of regulations, charters and bulk grant funding, a national curriculum guideline and a national qualifications framework, are helping to achieve this goal.

New Zealand prides itself on the diversity of its early childhood education services. We want to preserve this diversity in terms of distinctive cultural perspectives as in the Te Kohanga Reo and Pacific Island centres, distinctive philosophical perspectives as in playcentres, kindergartens, Montessori and Rudolph Steiner centres, differences in the structure of organisations, the length of time a service is available to families, and in the provisions for infants and children who have special developmental needs.

The framework of reforms that has been put in place is designed to ensure that the diversity of early childhood services is no longer out of date for New Zealand's economic, social and educational needs, is no longer perpetuating fragmentation and inequality between services, and is maximising the quality of care and education for New Zealand preschool children.